

'SKIP Research Bites' is a series of short summaries based on findings from the Singapore Kindergarten Impact Project.

Parent Perceptions of School Readiness

What does research tell us?

School readiness is defined as being equipped with the skills and knowledge that enable success in academic learning and social areas of child development (Blair et al., 2007). School readiness is commonly investigated during the transition from kindergarten to primary school settings. Studies have reported that successful transition practices which involve collaboration and support among pre-school and primary school educators, parents and children, can improve equity in education and can in turn influence children's academic and social competencies (Melhuish, 2014).

Elements of successful transition practices include:

- Shared values between early childhood settings and primary schools
- Alignment of curriculum and pedagogical practices between preschool and primary school
- Collaborative practices between preschool and primary school teachers
- Collaboration among staff, managers, parents and community (OECD, 2017, p.21)

Preschools conduct various practices to prepare young children for the transition to primary school settings, such as developing in children a sense of responsibility for their belongings. Since parents are also key in promoting successful transition practices to support children's school readiness, it is important to understand parents' perceptions of school transition practices.

To Learn More:

- ©Ng, S. C., & O'Brien, B. A. (July, 2018). *Parents' perceptions of school readiness: What can Singapore preschools do?* Presented at the International Conference on Teaching and Education Sciences, Okinawa, Japan.
- ©Blairs, C., Knipe, H., Commings, E., Baker, D.P., Gamson, D., Eslinger, P., & Thorne, S.L. (2007). A developmental neuroscience approach to the study of school readiness. In R.C. Pianta, M.J. Cox, & K.L. Snow (Eds.), *School readiness & the transition to kindergarten in the era of accountability* (pp. 149–173). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
- ©OECD. (2017), *Starting Strong V: Transitions from early childhood education and care to primary education*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- ©Melhuish, E. (2014). The impact of early childhood education and care on improved wellbeing. In British Academy (Eds.), *If you could do one thing... Nine local actions to reduce health inequalities*. London, UK: British Academy.

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What is this study about?

This study aims to investigate what parents believe about transition practices in pre-school that could help their children to adjust when they move from preschool to primary school settings.

Data was collected through a questionnaire from 258 parents of P1 children. Parents were asked to provide open-ended responses to the ways which preschools could help children adjust or cope with the transition. Analysis was performed to categorize parents' responses.



What did we find?

The study found that parents' perceptions went beyond academic preparation. While almost half of the parents expressed that preschools should focus on academic learning, almost as many parents reported another set of areas to be important when preschools prepare children for transition to primary schools. These areas include building of social and emotional skills, and self-help skills, and for pre-school educators to conduct more interactive ways of learning, etc. They saw these other needs as equally valid. Some of the responses from parents include:

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| Building social and emotional skills |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">“Allow children to be exposed to the various kinds of classmates that they are going to meet through storytelling. Teach students to be tolerant and accepting of children different from themselves in order to allow them to adapt to primary school environment (e.g. noisy, uncooperative students, inappropriate behaviours, how to befriend others, etc.)” |
| Building self-help skills |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">“...focus more on inculcating skills that will help them learn better as they move up, e.g independence, self-motivation and acceptance, curiosity and creativity... children develop differently and it's more important to help them realise their potential, which takes time, rather than just ticking off the checklist of milestones.” |
| Interactive teaching |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">“Give kids more encouragement than instructions.”“Using interesting and interactive teaching methods would be better than relying on textbooks.” |
| Engagement of community/ former students/ primary school |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">“Engaging volunteer to help children weak in reading.”“Talking to them about what to expect, school visits... Getting previous students to come back to speak about their primary one experience.”“...arrange for various primary schools to give talks in the preschool...” |
| Home-school partnerships |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">“...more interaction from teacher... for us to catch up our children's weaknesses and perhaps can have more practice at home.”“Take home activities (every fortnight) that could help to reinforce concepts taught back at school...” |

What does it mean for teaching and learning?

Parents' concerns on developing social and emotional skills, self-help skills, and the need for more interactive teaching and learning in the preschool years is in line with current efforts to guard against “schoolification”, which refers to the phenomenon when preschools adopt practices that are usually more related to primary school, in order to prepare children for the transition (OECD, 2017). “Schoolification” practices can be developmentally challenging, because they involve a greater focus on academic learning and less on building children's curiosity and play. This could create frustration with learning and reduce the joy of learning. Thus, it is important to lay the foundation for future learning but not to overprepare

children such that they are hurried into functioning in ways that are not appropriate to their natural modes of learning.

Instead, at these early ages, children's holistic development should be emphasized, with opportunities for purposeful play and authentic learning through quality interactions with teachers and caregivers (Ministry of Education, 2013). Even more important than academic learning and knowledge is an early cultivation of positive learning dispositions, which consist of perseverance, reflectiveness, appreciation, inventiveness, a sense of wonder and curiosity, along with engagement. These attitudes and behaviours strengthen the foundation for children's learning to extend beyond the early years. Parents also play an important role to instill these characteristics in their children. Educators can help parents play a role in supporting their children's transition from preschool to primary school by enhancing home-school partnerships in the following ways:

- consistently communicating the importance of holistic development to parents so that they pay equal attention to children's cognitive and non-cognitive development;
- designing home-based activities and explanation cards to promote various learning dispositions to help children develop a positive attitude towards learning; and
- providing tips for parents to encourage children to explore and ask questions so that children's learning can be enriched even at home.

